

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report #13

February, 1977

FOCUS ON MEN

"We don't have time," I remember a feminist friend saying, "to worry about men's liberation. It's true, like Martin Luther King said, that oppressors are also oppressed, but that kind of thinking muddies the issue. It's justice we're concerned about and priority energies simply need to be given to women. They're suffering the most."

And she's right, in one sense. That's why there's a Task Force on Women and continuing efforts at advocacy for women in Mennonite and wider circles. But it's not the whole picture, particularly for those of us who hold up a Christian vision of interdependence as our ultimate paradigm.

We have chosen to focus on men's liberation in this issue because: 1.) Our root commitment is to the church, to the understanding of sexuality as it affects all members of our male-female community. 2.) The liberation of men encourages and supports the liberation of women. The loosening of male stereotypes gives women as well as men more space to differ from role expectations: Men in liberation are the other side of women in liberation, the other half of the apple, the underside of the towel, the sand in the bag. Shifts in one affect the other. 3.) As Christians and particularly as Anabaptist Christians we are committed to liberating those who "oppress" as well as those who are "oppressed." As peacemakers, concerned also with justice, we want to explore the dynamics of social change as it relates to sexuality, to seek ways for the oppressed to relate to the oppressor that can result in creative rather than ultimately alienating change. 4.) Because we realize that categories such as oppressor and oppressed do not adequately reflect the complexities of our experiences, that many males are as oppressed by role expectations as women are, and that many women are, in their wealth, education and attitudes, oppressors of others, as well as oppressed.

Men, Warren Farrell points out, have much to benefit from women's liberation, though it may not seem clear at first glance. In any case, it will become increasingly difficult for men to ignore the results of the women's movement and what those results mean. Men must deal with increased female achievement and how that affects their work and home lives. As joint parenting is accepted, men must reevaluate the role of work in their lives. As male/female roles and forms of expression become more flexible, men must deal with fears of homosexuality. This Report only wades the shallows. We invite you to reflect further. --gk

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The Christian and the Cult of Masculinity
by Elizabeth Yoder

What are little boys made of?/ Snips and snails and puppy dog tails/ That's what little boys are made of!" So goes the nursery rhyme which then goes on to describe little girls as totally different--"Sugar and spice and everything nice/ That's what little girls are made of." It has only been recently that these assumptions

have been seriously challenged. The women's liberation movement has been questioning for some time whether the roles and personality traits of women are a given that cannot be changed without deep and serious consequences for society, and now the new 'men's liberation' movement is challenging the traditional assumptions about maleness.

What interests me in all this discussion of male roles and male personality traits is how often the male role as defined by our society is at variance with the Christian personality as defined by the New Testament. Warren Farrell in his book The Liberated Man suggests ten traits that our society values and considers 'masculine.' Each of the traits or values has a 'feminine' counterpart which is its opposite or near-opposite. What struck me in reading this list is how often the traits listed as 'feminine' are traits of the Christian personality as described by the New Testament. One thinks, for example, of the list in Galatians 5:22: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control." (NEB)

In fact, I think perhaps Jesus himself was the original liberated man. He did not fit many of the characteristics of the male role as our culture defines it. For example, the male in our culture is supposed to be tough and brave and always keep a stiff upper lip. He does not cry. He does not express tenderness and gentleness, except, perhaps to his spouse and his own children. Jesus, however, on more than one occasion is said to have wept. He showed fear ("Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me . . .") and admitted hurt ("I thirst"). He showed tenderness for children, holding them on his lap. And the Gospels tell us that some of his best friends were women.

The male role, as defined by our culture places a great deal of emphasis on success or the appearance of success. Certain symbols have come to be equated with success--wealth, power, status, etc. If a man is not wealthy, he tries to have the appearance of wealth--the best car, clothes and house he can afford, or he tries to seem successful by associating with people

who have high status.

Jesus, however, taught his disciples a lifestyle which was the exact opposite of this. He rejected the traditionally male pursuit of money and the status consumption that goes with it and spoke sharply against the rich. His own ministry was at least partially supported by a group of women (so much for male independence!) who followed him and his disciples about paying for them out of their own resources. (Luke 8:1-3) His friends were simple fishermen and reformed outcasts.

Success, and hence masculinity, is also judged by the amount of power (dominance) that a man has over others. Jesus' style of leadership, however, was paradoxical. Instead of using his power to dominate others, he demonstrated a leadership of servanthood. For example, he washed his disciples' feet and told them to follow his example. He taught his disciples that the search for status was not a legitimate pursuit for his followers: "You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of their authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be the willing slave of all." (Mark 10:42, NEB)

Another aspect of the masculine role in our culture is the aura of aggression and violence. Although most people in our society do not openly condone violence, they are concerned about the masculinity of the boy who does not fight back and the man who does not take arms to protect himself, his property or his country. By contrast, Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies, not to pay back evil for evil, but to actually do good to those who would persecute them. When he was arrested, he did not resist. In fact, he told his disciples not to defend him either.

Was Jesus a man? Certainly we would all agree that he was. But not a man such as our culture defines masculinity, nor probably as his own culture defined it. Jesus pointed instead to a new and radical type of personhood which may call into question the assumptions of our culture. Jesus pointed to a new humanity--beyond masculinity.

Elizabeth Yoder and her husband, Perry, are currently serving as traveling Bible teachers for congregations in the General Conference Mennonite Church. They are in the process of preparing a study guide on men's liberation for the conference.

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Humankind when living is soft and tender;
When dead, they are hard and tough.
The ten thousand creatures
And all plants and trees
While they live are supple and soft.
But when they die: hard and stiff.
So it is said: what is hard and stiff
Belongs to death;
The soft and tender belong to life.
Therefore, the weapon that is too rigid
Will shatter;
The tree made of hardest wood
Will break.
Truly: the hard and mighty are easily
overthrown;
The soft and weak endure and rise up.

--from the Tao Te Ching

* * *

From Europe to America
Reflections on Growing Up Male

Dear Gayle,

You asked me to write for you a short first person account of my growth as a male, to speak from the gut of my struggle to be a man.

The more I thought of writing, the more difficult the task appeared; partly because the struggle has been mine, why should I pass it on, partly because living so closely to myself I often lose perspective on the meaning of my experience.

I had the privilege of growing up in Europe, in a cosmopolitan center, not a midwestern agrarian village, as you did. Our school had co-educational classes from junior high level on. So in seventh grade the boys joined the girls. This sudden merging did not spur a sudden interest in the males by the females or vice-versa. Rather all the way through high school, group activities were the foci of social life. Preferential, dating type relationships were extremely rare, men and women related openly and equally in the active group situation. Women in

our social milieu were high achievers, and men and women both were geared toward professional careers. I felt no distinct barriers between men and women; we were all in the same boat, together and free.

My second great privilege was to grow up with a mother who involved me in housework and cooking, with a seamstress who was part of our extended family and who took time to explain her work to me, and with a father who was not embarrassed or ashamed to have a son with a sensitive nature or with domestic interests, even though he himself did not know how to buy thread or zippers, and did not intend to learn (that was not his domain).

Now there were physical codes or averages for males and females, and I was always secretly proud of the fact that my lankiness, (some call it thinness, others bless their hearts, call it slenderness), fit the exact demands of the french Haute Couture, in terms of height and weight. Then . . .

I came to these United States of America, to the high school scene where dating rhymed with deodorant, and car rhymed with cruising, where (1968) the codes said: Kiss on the first date, neck on the second, pet on the third and park where the patrol car won't come around on the fourth. Being without a date was a tragedy, being with a date appeared to be a tragi-comedy, trying to follow prescriptions and codes, to be man on the spot, was plain hell.

Attributes for maleness were suddenly heaved at me. I discovered that the places where you were most likely to establish your maleness were on the ball court, on the ball field, on the back seat of the car; hard manual labor, the tougher the better, would also help the image along, as well as would attendance in a physics class or being able to disclose that you now did shave regularly, once every morning.

I was threatened. I didn't fit. To my great surprise though I discovered that other men were threatened by me. Women, on the other hand, have never seemed threatened. I was never told to please stay out of woman's territory, whereas I have been told to please straighten up and

"act like a man," this by other men.

Being able to accept my skills and interests as part of my maleness was at times very difficult, especially when faced by other men who would disclaim me consciously or not.

The certainty of my freedom to be a male, on the terms which I had been given, according to my needs and sensitivities, came only through deep exchanges with other men, usually men who were struggling from the other end of the spectrum, with their dominant-male-image.

Being married to a woman who respects and asserts my maleness, as well as makes room for my interests in traditionally female tasks, and who enjoys that in me, has been a real boost.

So yesterday my day consisted of getting up at 6:00 a.m., dressing myself and our son, getting breakfast, and waking up Jean to join us before her morning classes. The rest of the morning was spent doing dishes, making beds, dusting and scrubbing floors (that is one of my favorite occupations), baking bread and playing with Reuben who helped with all the rest.

I recently finished a dress for Jean, and knitted a blanket for Reuben. If I have my share of domestic tasks, I don't on the other hand ignore the more traditionally male roles: I recently wired up two lamps and fixed our sewing machine and there's a tire to change on the car tomorrow morning. Believe me Gayle, I even sometimes come home in the evening and sit down and read the newspaper.

Your brother-in-law,

Stephen D. Shank

Stephen Shank and Jean Gerber Shank are students in fine arts and music, respectively, at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

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From Machismo to Mutuality

A Review by Elsie Enns Steelberg and Donald R. Steelberg

From Machismo to Mutuality: Essays on Sexism and Woman-Man Liberation, Eugene

C. Bianchi and Rosemary R. Ruether, Paulist Press, N.Y., 1976, 142 pp., \$5.95.

In a series of eight alternating essays, plus introduction and epilogue, Eugene Bianchi and Rosemary Ruether probe the underlying core of oppression common to female-male relationships, religion and racism. Centered on our American experience, the book nevertheless ranges over Eastern religious philosophy and Western culture and theology.

Both authors are Roman Catholic and concerned with their church. But their concern and experience does not exclude others. Their book gives an understanding of the historical development of sexism, a hard-hitting study. Questions for reflection and discussion of the chapters are included.

The essays are difficult to read. They are also absorbing. Ruether first paints the historical picture of sexism in Western culture and theology. She traces the fear of the feminine, and the male-female dualism that appears in religious thought and in the secular world like archeological strata from remote pre-history to today.

Bianchi then puts this history into self-story. He recounts the chauvinist attitudes learned from his family, church and society; then his move toward overcoming stereotypes and prejudices in female-male relationships. While the Marian influence of his church may not be that of the Protestant, he shows clearly how male chauvinism contradicts the trust and freedom from works-righteousness inherent in the Christian faith.

In chapters three and four Ruether deals with the 19th Century's affect on sexism in the United States and Bianchi with the Super Bowl culture of male violence. Ruether shows how the 19th Century idealization of woman effectively removed her from the real world of men and public power as had her earlier denigration. This leads to a morality which becomes sentimental, privatized and identified with the feminine sphere of the home. Bianchi's chapter on the use of violence in the development of the male psyche is a natural outgrowth.

Next, the authors turn to the personalization of sexuality, first through consideration of the ways it is de-personalized: then through study of the difference of physical or psychical celibacy. Bianchi notes that it is not the church alone which has promulgated celibacy. Our culture, by excluding women in leadership roles, by making woman's roles ancillary and compensatory, foists psychic celibacy upon men.

In the final set of essays Reuther advocates for women a combination of self-esteem and protest against oppression, and a sisterhood which avoids feminine separatism. Bianchi is again autobiographical, exploring the steps taken to struggle from machismo to mutuality. A typographical error on page 125 mars the development of thought.

We found this to be a thought-provoking book. It would be a good resource for a discussion group. Professor Reuther is particularly prophetic in challenging feminists not to be separatist but work for mutual growth, in challenging the male bias of the Scriptures, in charging encounter groups and psychology with sexism favoring the male, and in questioning the quest for intimacy so popular today. Professor Bianchi, in his autobiographical openness, calls us men to a more genuine

Christian faith.

The book may provide some difficulty for Evangelicals, depending on their theory of inspiration of Scripture. Reuther says for instance: 'Recognizing both men and women as autonomous equal persons "by nature," we must recognize the stories of the creation and the fall as themselves a part of the fall, as themselves expressions of male ideology justifying false power (p. 14).' By challenging the male ideology to which our theories of inspiration are captive, Reuther asks us to re-think our understanding of authority. How do we accept the Biblical account? Shall we trust that the Spirit is leading us into greater understanding? It is in this perspective which one must see her treatment of homosexuality, as one possible way of opening one's self to another.

This perhaps marks the importance of the book. It is a call to reflective thought and dialogue. It is a call to see female-male liberation as no fad, but a door to deepened faith, wider outlook and invitation to community.

Elsie Enns Steelberg is an anesthesiologist in Wadsworth, Ohio. Donald Steelberg is pastor of the First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth, Ohio.

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RELATED RESOURCES

Books and Articles

Bianchi, Eugene. "The Superbowl Culture of Male Violence." Christian Century (September 18, 1974): 842-45. Especially helpful for relating peace and sex role issues.

Bucher, Glen R. "Liberation, Male and White: Initial Reflections." Christian Century (March 20, 1974)

David, Deborah S. and Robert Brannon, ed. The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role. Reading, MS: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976. Paper. Recommended for its introductory collection of relevant essays.

Farrell, Warren. The Liberated Man. New York: Random House, 1974. Bantam paperback \$1.95

Fasteau, Marc Feigen. The Male Machine. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974 Delta paperback, \$2.95.

Filene, Peter Gabriel. Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America. Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1974. Mentor Books. paperback, \$2,50.

Goldbert, Herb. The Hazards of Being Male. New York: Nash Publishing, 1976.

Komarovsky, Mirra. Dilemmas of Masculinity: A Study of College Youth. W.W. Norton and Company, 1976.

Malcomson, William L. Success Is a Failure Experience: Male Liberation and the American Myth of Success. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Pr-ss, 1976.

Marine, Gene. A Male Guide to Women's Liberation. Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972. Discus/Avon. Paperback \$1.65.

Nichols, Jack. Men's Liberation: A New Definition of Masculinity. Penguin paperback, \$2.50.

Pleck, Joseph H. and Jack Sawyer, ed. Men and Masculinity. Englewood Cliffs: N.J.: Prentice-Sall, Inc., 1974. Spectrum paperback, \$2.95.

Steinmetz, Urban G. The Male Mystique. Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Marie Press, 1970.

Films

The Game. High school student, provoked by friends to prove his claimed ability as a seducer, seeks to demonstrate his masculinity by winning over a young woman in his class. McGraw-Hill, 28 min. Available through the University of Michigan Audio-Visual Center, 416 Fourth St., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

Men's Lives, a documentary film about masculinity in America. 16mm, color, 43 min. Rental \$56 plus \$4 handling from New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NY, 07417

Pillar of Wisdom. Fifty young freshman, smeared with grease try to get a cap on top of a 20-foot pole. 9-minute, 1970. Available from the University of Michigan Audio-Visual Center. See The Game for address.

Sticky My Fingers, Fleet My Feet. Deflates on of the classic American myths: the middle-aged male who clings to a youthful standard of physical prowess and virility. Time-Life, 23-minute, 1970. Available from the University of Michigan Audio-Visual Center. See The Game for address.

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LETTERS

Dear Gayle;

Thank you for the report number 12 from the MCC Task Force on Women in Church and Society. I note with delight the two new members and know that we are well served.

Your "Focus on Parenthood" issue neglected any mention of developmentally disable children though at least one of your commentators could have spoken to that special kind of parenting. [Note: a copy of

preliminary list of development disability resources for caring communities is available from Nancy.]

Enclosed additionally, is a carbon of a letter sent to Leonard Wiebe in response to his call to the ministry in the AMBS Bulletin. Want to heartily affirm your decision to ask for the appointment of someone to deal specifically with women's concerns in the Mennonite Church.

In His service,

Nancy K. Williams
 Consultant, Developmental Disabilities
 Mennonite Mental Health Services
 5927 Miller Street
 Arvado, CO 80004

Leonard Wiebe, Pastor
 Faith Mennonite Church
 Newton, KS 67114

Dear Brother Wiebe:

My bulletin from AMBS has just arrived, and I note with delight your back page reflection on the pastoral ministry. It seems to me that you have accurately described the involvements which a pastoral ministry call for. I am delighted to have you extend that call to young people. In a preceding paragraph you had mentioned the excitement of helping men and women face their Creator and Savior, and I am assuming that your call to young people includes men and women. Not only is Western District short of ministers, but when I visited in Manitoba, there was concern about the shortage of pastors. After my visit to Manitoba, I spent time at AMBS and also attended the conference on Women in the Ministry and discovered that women professionally prepared for the pastoral ministry by AMBS, nevertheless, were having difficulty in implementing their call to pastoral work.

I am interested, I guess, in how the apparent surplus of women who have answered the call for young people can be utilized to meet that shortage. Do you have any reflections, comments, suggestions?

Nancy K. Williams
 5927 Miller Street
 Arvada, Colorado 80004

Dear Gayle,

I couldn't help but respond to the December, 1976 Report that focused on parenting by wishing reference

had been made to Parenting: Principles and Politics of Parenthood by Sidney Cornelia Callahan (Penguin, 1973). My solid recommendation of the book is because of helpful ideas like the following direct quotes:

. . . an essential goal of human parenthood . . .: To make our children glad they were born and eager for life Today . . . the development of an independent personal autonomy on the part of the child is all-important The great test of any good leader and parent is how well you develop another's ability to act and lead The first and foremost parental mandate: Be your child's advocate in the world There is little so-called parental instinct or innately programmed mothering or fathering. Human parents must learn to parent, they must be self-conscious nothing, but nothing, has ever been more of a personal challenge than parenting.

Dorothy Yoder Nyce
 Cambridge, MA (temporarily)

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NEWS

As the editor is perched on the eastern edge of the North American Mennonite world, she would appreciate assistance in gathering items of interest to persons **interested in sexuality and the Mennonite Church**. Please forward notices re college or graduate students working on papers related to women's studies, actions by local congregations, etc.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Task Force has outlined special topics for the next three issues:

April	media
June	women and language
August	rape, physical violence

As we define these topics further we ask your help. Are you aware of written or audio-visual resources on these issues that should be recommended in the Report? Have you or do you know someone who has been researching or writing on these topics, particularly as they relate to peace issues, Mennonites or the Christian church? What actions have been taken related to these areas in the community where you are living or by your church?

We'll be emptier without you.

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, Editor, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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